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FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4166
INFO RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 0287
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 7763

C O N F I D E N T I A L BRUSSELS 000233

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/22/2017
TAGS: AF BE EAID MARR MOPS PINS PREL
SUBJECT: BELGIAN PLANS ON AFGHANISTAN AT JANUARY 26
INFORMAL NATO FOREIGN MINISTERIAL

REF: A. A. STATE 7434
 1B. B. STATE 4834 C. 2006 USNATO 0658 D
 1C. 2006 BRUSSELS 4152

Classified By: DCM William Imbrie; reasons 1.5 B and D.

11. (C) Per refs A and B instructions, we outlined U.S. thinking on Afghanistan with the three key players on this issue in Belgium -- the Prime Minister's Office, the Foreign Ministry, and the Defense Ministry. Our contacts were pleased to learn of USG plans to provide additional support for Afghanistan, and reaffirmed the Verhofstadt government's intention to implement the commitments it made during the NATO summit in Riga. (Belgian assistance plans are outlined in ref C.)

12. (C) We expect the Belgians to use the January 26 session in Brussels to announce one important, but still incremental adjustment to their Riga commitments. According to senior sources in the Foreign Ministry and the Prime Minister's office, the Belgians intend to take over management of Kabul Airport starting in October 2007 for what they anticipate will stretch to a full year, during which the airport will extend services to both civilian and military. This broadened mandate will entail a slight increase in the number of deployed troops, where most are now stationed. Despite persistent requests to do so, the Belgians are not planning any changes in their policy on caveats. Extending the deployment of Belgium's sole C-130 in Afghanistan since October 2006 beyond February 2007 will be decided in light of international priorities (Afghanistan, Lebanon, DRC) at that time. We understand the Prime Minister is prepared to make a commitment of F-16's (it has a total of four) to Afghanistan in October -- if he is re-elected in June. The importance of the election calculations in the decisions of government leaders, a senior diplomat explained, is based in part on the fact that Afghanistan is not a popular public issue here.

13. (U) Belgium's plans for a net increase of Euro 30 million in development assistance for 2007-2010 remain unchanged. It also has Euro one million remaining to be spent from the 2001 Tokyo donors meeting. Experts in the Development Ministry are actively seeking to identify projects for that as well as the first new tranche of Euro 4.7 million. The Foreign Ministry stressed that Belgium is open to suggestions (Ref A, for example) for new development projects. Our interlocutor there undertook to learn if the addition of Afghanistan to Belgium's list of development partners might be advantageous in fulfilling

Belgium's Official Development Assistance (ODA) numbers. He discussed how, even in major structural projects as road-building, Belgium seeks to work through organizations that engage Afghan workers and increases their sense of national ownership. We understand that the Belgians are speaking with Dutch and Thai NGO's on continued rule of law and counter-narcotics programs.

¶4. (U) Belgium has no Embassy but only one junior diplomat in Afghanistan, who conducts his work by computer and attends coordinating meetings with the Belgian military, we were told (like an American Presence Post) APP, it would seem). If the country develops more assistance projects, the Foreign Ministry, it would then need to open a development assistance office.

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